

Book Reviews

Pathology of the Heart & Sudden Death in Forensic Medicine, V. Fineschi, G. Baroldi, M.D. Silver. CRC Press (2006). p. 519, £79.99, ISBN: 0-8493-7048-5

The aim of this book is to address the pathology of the heart from a forensic perspective. 13 authors have contributed to the book, which covers a broad range of cardiopathological aspects. The book contains the following chapters: introduction; functional anatomy of the heart; heart's examination; basic pathophysiological changes; specific heart diseases and sudden cardiac death; endocardial lesions and sudden death; sudden cardiac death in infants and children; cardiac alterations in sudden infant death (SIDS); sudden cardiac death and channelopathies; interpretation of pathological changes in sudden death; clinical techniques for the anatomic and functional evaluation of the heart; cardiovascular traumatic injuries; cardiac surgery and forensic medicine; drugs of abuse and pathology of the heart; appendix; references.

In my opinion the following chapters are of particular forensic relevance: Chapter 10 discusses amongst other things the interpretation of cardiopathological changes in connection with emotional stress – a very difficult issue of continuous forensic relevance (and frequent contention in court); Chapter 12 deals with cardiovascular traumatic injuries, the subsection on iatrogenic traumas is worth mentioning; chapter 14 gives a helpful outline of cardiovascular complications related to drug abuse.

With regard to the look of the book I have an issue with the photographic examples: Most of them are simply too small to see the detail necessary and furthermore the colours appear oversaturated and unrealistic. Pictures are

invaluable to re-enforce the points being made and the quality of the reproduction should be improved in the next edition.

Unfortunately some of the suggested practical procedures regarding the heart's examination will be difficult to apply in the UK, particularly in coroner's cases where the possibilities of tissue retention and histological examinations are limited.

The wealth of information is at first overwhelming and confusing. This is not for the reader who is looking for a quick answer. It is a tome that demands in-depth study: by juxtaposing a large variety of pathologic findings and interpretations it can inform an unbiased and balanced expert opinion. The meticulous attention to detail is reflected by the impressive reference list (pp. 369–465) which offers a comprehensive review of the international literature available. It is remarkable, however, that only a small proportion of the cited references are sourced from forensic literature.

Overall, this book gives a profound insight into a multitude of cardiopathological aspects not only from a forensic perspective but also an overall perspective of death investigation. It is of practical relevance for all those involved in post mortem examinations and it may be of special interest to clinicians with a focus on cardiology.

Judith Schröer

Specialist in Forensic Medicine, Germany
E-mail address: juju_schroeer@yahoo.com

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The Forensic Laboratory Handbook: Procedures and Practice. Edited by Ashraf Mozayani and Carla Noziglia. Humana Press Inc. 2006. £55.00, ISBN: 1-59259-946-X

The stated audience for this book is anyone wanting to move from the fiction of the media portrayal of forensic science to the fact of a real laboratory. It is ideal for students (and I note that my own learning institution already has three copies on its shelves) and also for anyone wanting to glean an insight into how a real forensic laboratory works. In parts it is frustrating for lack of scientific detail; then where there is in depth detail it has too much of an

American perspective e.g. use of terms such as testimony stipulation or serology instead of body fluid examinations. On the whole, however, the explanations of the critical thinking processes involved in forensic science are valuable; allowing knowledge of the capabilities and limitations of any aspect of forensic science. Police and legal users of forensic science might find it a useful resource though perhaps too technical in parts. The value of a tailored approach to each case is the underlying message – surely the signpost of any quality laboratory wanting to make best use of resources in the fine line between wrongful exonerations or wrongful convictions. Case examples are

used sparingly to illustrate particular aspects of forensic processes. The useful distinction between an investigator and the forensic examiner is made (unlike the media portrayals).

The order of the chapters with trace evidence types (hairs, fibres, glass and paint) being last and accorded little space does not fit with my experience of the relative merits of those evidence types. There is no mention at all of footwear marks. Given the comprehensive literature available on scene examination and reconstruction (such as Henry Lee) then it was as well to keep the chapter on scenes to a basic introduction of concepts. Indeed many of the varied forensic disciplines covered are just touched upon. For that reason the references and suggested further reading listed in each chapter are essential. Many of the contents of the glossaries appeared somewhat unrelated to the contents of the chapter.

There are some publishing anomalies for example, the images solely relating to the explosives and arson chapter were not useful in black and white but were then repeated

in colour later in the book; the colour plates could just have been put in the relevant chapter.

I would recommend the text as a quick and useful way to improve one's knowledge of forensic science; whether you are a student, a practitioner wanting to read around fresh areas such as digital evidence or a non-scientific manager in forensic science (a growing breed in the UK). I guarantee that everyone would learn something new or gain a fresh perspective though they might have to skip the sections that they found to be too familiar or too esoteric for them.

Sara Short BSc PhD
(Senior Lecturer (part-time) in Forensic Science)
*School of Applied Sciences,
Wolverhampton University,
Wulfruna Street, Wolverhampton WV1 1SB,
United Kingdom
E-mail address: s.short@wlv.ac.uk*

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